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*The*  
**Illinois  
Farmers'  
Institute**  
*and ITS JOB*

*By*  
**E. DAVENPORT**  
Dean, College of Agriculture,  
University of Illinois.

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**Illinois Farmers' Institute**

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THE Illinois Farmers' Institute is fundamentally a people's organization. It is non-political and non-sectarian, is identified with no class, corporation, nor faction. It has no axes to grind, no patronage to distribute, nor selfish schemes to promulgate. Its sole aim, object and purpose is that of useful public service in the interest of all the people.

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# The Illinois Farmers' Institute

and

## Its Job

BY E. DAVENPORT,

Dean, College of Agriculture, University of Illinois

(Address, 27th Annual Meeting, Illinois Farmers' Institute, Monmouth,  
February 24, 1922.)

IT is now considerably over a quarter of a century since the Illinois Farmers' Institute entered upon one of the most useful and forward looking programs that ever engaged the activities of any agricultural organization.

It is not my purpose to attempt a review of this notable service to agriculture. My purpose is rather to call attention to some special features of this work as they have come to my attention, partly by way of grateful acknowledgment for personal and official assistance, but more especially to call attention to the kind of work the Farmers' Institute is especially well prepared to undertake.

I am the more encouraged to call attention to the achievements of the Institute in the past and its opportunities for service in the future because the question is sometimes asked, "Why do we need so big a machine for so small a grist; and cannot somebody else hold the institute meetings as well as the State Institute, the Agricultural College or the Department of Agriculture, for example?"

In one form or another I have been asked this question many times, and I have always answered in effect that if it is only the county institute meetings that are in mind, or even the annual state meeting, like the present

great gathering, almost any public agency could make the arrangements, hold the meetings, and run off the programs as well as can the State Institute. I have even gone further and said that if we had nothing in mind but public meetings, I am not sure but that the College could beat the Institute. Indeed, I am not certain but that the State Department of Agriculture could beat either of us—for a time.

**Unselfish  
Public  
Service.**

“For a time,” I say, because to me the great thing about the Illinois Farmers’ Institute is not the meetings held, great as they are, whether county or state, but the *great thing about the Illinois Farmers’ Institute is the Institute itself.*

This is what I mean: It matters not so much that we have meetings and programs, or even that the meetings and programs are good. What matters is that the programs shall include subjects and ways of treatment that represent the best thought of the most progressive farmers of the state, not only in certain lines of agricultural progress but in any and all lines, especially those most likely to be overlooked and neglected by the other organizations.

For example, we may confidently expect that the Horticultural Society will look after the affairs of horticulture, especially in its commercial aspects. In the same way the various breed associations will take care of the interests of their respective breeds of horses, cattle, sheep and swine. The Dairy Association will look after dairy matters, and if anything is overlooked or falls between, it would seem that the Grange, or the Illinois Agricultural Association would find it.

And yet *every one of these organizations has a rather definite program that fully occupies its time and*



*attention*, especially the newest of all, which is really the federation of County Farm Bureaus and the parent extraordinary to a multitude of local sub-organizations for the attainment of ends that in general fall under the rather broad head of the business side of farming.

Without the Farmers' Institute we should lack an open forum managed by the farmers themselves for the discussion of all such questions as may *interest them—not somebody else*. The Institute has been such a forum, and as long as Illinois can secure such management of what shall be discussed from that forum year by year in county and in state meetings, and get all this for the bare cost of the traveling expenses of a quarter of a hundred representative farmers—just that long she will be lucky indeed.

**No** It is therefore not so much that we have  
**Foolish** one hundred and two county meetings and  
**Propaganda.** a big state round up every year, but rather it is *the trails that are blazed* at these meetings that count, and it speaks well of this management that during all these years with their troublous times *no foolish propaganda has been permitted, and no extravagant ground has ever been taken.*

On the other hand, this Institute has taken some exceedingly *advanced ground with regard to agricultural progress*, and it is that to which I would call attention, particularly such portions of this service as have come under my personal observation and within my own field of knowledge.

For example, it was from the platform of the Institute that the campaign for better roads was originally promulgated and shaped up gradually into what would seem feasible procedure. In this way was prejudice turned into intelligent interest, and there is probably no

better example of what can be done by consistent and conservative study of large questions in ways that are really constructive and publicly understood.

What the Institute has done for the home must not be forgotten, for some of the earliest and best suggestions for home improvement came through its publications. Not only that, but the Institute afforded the medium whereby pioneers like Mrs. Dunlap, Mrs. Kedzie Jones, Professor Bevier and their followers have, year after year, in season and out of season, reached multitudes with the gospel of better homes. But it is within the field of agriculture that I would more particularly speak.

**Big Jobs Well Done.** The first great job undertaken by the Institute was the rejuvenation, or, more properly speaking, *the reincarnation of the College of Agriculture* at the State University. The Institute was hardly out of its swaddling clothes when this job was undertaken, but like Minerva of old, the giant was born fully matured, as events proved, and through it's medium of expression and influence the farmers of the state made not only their wishes but also the necessities of the situation known.

It was a *purely unselfish service in the interest of the whole public* and has been so regarded. There were other agricultural organizations, and good ones, but none so well cut out for this particular job as was the Farmers' Institute. *It was the agency by which public opinion was crystallized and expressed*, by which Amos Moore, James H. Cooledge, S. Noble King, Charles F. Mills, A. P. Grout, N. B. Morrison, Ralph Allen, Frank I. Mann and a host of others, many of whom have long since gone to their reward, showed the state at once its duty and its opportunity.

If the Institute had never rendered another public service than to function as the means of providing Illinois with a real College of Agriculture, it would have fully justified its existence.

But that was only a beginning. A real study of Illinois agriculture from the standpoint of science and of progress showed at once the place that research and experimentation must take in the scheme of state development in the field of agriculture, and a systematic study of the soils of the state was begun under the special patronage and support and advice of the Institute.

It was many years ago that *through the activities and at the solicitation of the Farmers' Institute the State Soil Survey was begun*, and it has continued uninterrupted ever since. It is at once the most thorough, the most exhaustive, the most beneficial, and the most far reaching study of the soil ever entered upon by any state or any nation of the earth.

**Independent Self Management Essential.** This is my answer to the question whether or not the University could conduct the institutes better than the Institute. The institutes with a little "I" are meetings, and almost anybody could conduct them if he could get people to attend. But the Institute with a big "I" is an institution, and *it cannot be "conducted," or "held," or otherwise managed except by itself. To attempt to put any one of its creatures over it is to destroy it.* Nor must we mistake the shadow for the substance by assuming that when we have attended an institute meeting we have seen the Institute.

The institute as a meeting is good or bad according as the immediate officers were wise or unwise in choosing topics, the speakers in treating them, and the attendance in giving real attention to the subjects under discussion.

But the Institute as an institution is as good as the men that make it, and as long as the best men will volunteer into its service for their expenses only and will give it the best of their thought, just so long will it be our most elastic and at the same time *the most powerful single agent of progress, especially along lines likely to be neglected by leading and direct commercial interests.*

For example: Out of the survey and the experiments in the behavior of our different soil types has grown the idea of a System of Permanent Agriculture. Some have called it the "Hopkins System" because that great man was practically the inventor, as he was also its most ardent and able exponent. Some have called it the "Illinois System" because it was worked out in Illinois and the details have been so widely criticised elsewhere.

It might be called the Common Sense System, because it stands to reason that we must put back as much as we take off if our successors are to maintain themselves. It might be called the Inevitable System because we shall all be forced to it, the only question being whether it shall produce at a high or at a starvation rate.

It might be called *the Farmers' Institute System* because that has been the popular agency that has sustained it all these years, and given it a hearing and a sympathetic trial.

Whatever it may or may not be called—and what's in a name after all?—the thing is with us to stay. What is Illinois going to do with her soils? is a question that the Farmers' Institute has asked not only through the researches of the Experiment Station, which it helped to endow, but by its own activities, its own discussions, and indeed its own convictions that questions of fertility do not solve themselves.

Yes, the question is with us to stay. Our great leader, Dr. Hopkins, is gone. Peace be to his ashes;

his memory is ever green with us, but let his findings and the deliberations of the Farmers' Institute be not forgot.

**Important  
Work  
Ahead.**

*To this great work the Farmers' Institute is called,* as much as any body of men was ever called to any great service, and I fervently hope that while it heeds the

call and follows it, no man will ask the question whether some other body or agency could not do its work more cheaply. The thing that the Farmers' Institute has begun and can continue is what will stand between Illinois and the decadence that has threatened every civilization on earth and that has overtaken and destroyed most of them that have stood for any considerable period of years.

Our fertility and its preservation is not the only great question that awaits the good offices of the Farmers' Institute. Illinois should speedily enter upon a home building era such as the agricultural world has never seen. The time has come now when the country home can be a thing of comfort. We should not make the mistake that France made when building her permanent homes and build them so small or of such character that they cannot be equipped with modern conveniences. A country cannot rebuild its homes every generation. Permanent homes should be built in the youth of a country while it is strong and rich and before it becomes over populated from expending all its strength in numbers.

All this means many problems for a state like Illinois, and *the Farmers' Institute has a mighty work to do in thinking out these long thoughts ahead* and talking about them year after year, because the form of our advancing civilization must develop by plan and intention and not "just happen."



THE ILLINOIS FARMERS' INSTITUTE

We are going into a *new agriculture and in many respects a new civilization*. Within another quarter of a century the center of population will be within the borders of Illinois, where it will probably remain indefinitely.

We have the fourth largest city in the world, and in time it will be the most important. We are at the center of the greatest agricultural land area of the world, which has also coal and oil under the surface and the best of transportation possibilities both by land and water, connecting it with the most populous and the most highly civilized of all the nations of the earth. Out of this development will rise multitudes of question that will *need exactly the kind of foresight and breadth of vision that can be supplied only by a state-wide, non-commercial agricultural organization such as the Illinois Farmers' Institute*.

*Illinois must not come short of her opportunity and her obligation in all this, and if she is to live fully up to her possibilities as she goes along she needs just such a monitor and just such a forum as the Farmers' Institute can provide.* Here lies the job for the Illinois Farmers' Institute.

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